

F E R D I N A N D S U T T E R L Ü T Y

## *The Paradox of Ethnic Equality*

### Abstract

This essay deals with the findings of an ethnographic study carried out in two urban neighborhoods in Germany. Although the German residents felt bound by the norms of ethnic equality, they used negative classifications to stigmatize upwardly mobile members of the Turkish community. In doing so, they undermined these equality norms without explicitly calling them into question. This paradox can be explained by a latently active, primordial belief in kinship, which is ultimately rooted in a symbolic order of ethnic inequality.

*Keywords:* Ethnic equality; Social inequality; Ethnicity; Primordial sentiments; Classification; Norms; Paradox.

I N W E S T E R N D E M O C R A C I E S , which have bidden farewell to the idea of a natural or God-given social order and are based on the premise of collective self-determination,<sup>1</sup> all social inequalities are subject to a high degree of legitimation pressure. In the post-metaphysical age, the burden of proof for justifying inequality has been reversed. As Gertrud Nunner-Winkler argues, the divergence from the principle of equality now requires explanation, not the assumption of its validity.<sup>2</sup> Whereas it is possible to use established normative standards such as generally recognized achievements to legitimize many of the social inequalities that exist between different professional groups, social classes and people of different educational backgrounds, the inequalities associated with ethnic differences often provoke criticism and public debate. They are considered especially problematic if they are attributable to ideas of the fundamental superiority of certain ethnic groups and the inferiority of others.

The people and groups that classify ethnic minorities as inferior and not deserving of equal treatment leave themselves open to attack, since they contravene the norms that are constitutive of modern

<sup>1</sup> HABERMAS [1989] 1997, pp. 39 ff.

<sup>2</sup> NUNNER-WINKLER 1997, p. 364.

societies and their institutions. The denial or disregard of the right to equal physical and symbolic integrity and the use of ethnic characteristics to overtly or clandestinely discriminate against people in their attempt to access social resources clearly rank among the social inequalities that cannot be legitimized.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the normative principle of human equality must necessarily discredit the “racist”. Furthermore, if all citizens should be granted access rights to the central resources and institutions of society – regardless of their origin or affiliation – the “ethnocentrist”, who claims special privileges for his own group, will only reap criticism. The fundamental, widely recognized norms expressed in these positions are not only guaranteed in the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (*Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*)<sup>4</sup> but have also been incorporated into the General Equal Treatment Act (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz*), passed in 2006.

Nevertheless, if the norms of ethnic equality are to be implemented in social reality, they must be enforced in the sphere of informal communication, beyond formal bans on discrimination and anti-discrimination legislation. After all, everyday interethnic relations to a great degree determine the chances ethnic groups have of participating equally in society. A central role is played by neighborly relations between ethnic groups in socially disadvantaged city districts. Not only do these areas often have the most heterogeneous ethnic populations; as we know from urban sociology,<sup>5</sup> they are often also home to a native population that, due to its often precarious social situation, provides the worst conditions for accepting the equal status of immigrants and overcoming cultural difference or foreignness. Members of the native population often see their immigrant neighbors as unwanted competitors and describe them using ethnic categorizations that deny them the right to an equal standing with long-time residents – though I obviously do not mean this in a strictly legal sense. Such degrading classifications can restrict the ethnic groups’ chances of acquiring material goods, their participation in politics and their access to valuable social relations.

Against this backdrop one must ask whether the native residents who deprecate members of other ethnic groups and attempt to exclude

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SCHMIDT 2000, p. 288.

<sup>4</sup> Section 3, paragraph 3, states: “No person shall be favored or disfavored because of sex, parentage, race, language, homeland and origin, faith, or religious or political opin-

ions. No person shall be disfavored because of disability”.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, HÄUßERMANN and SIEBEL 2004, p. 14.

them from the arenas of social participation reject the described norms of equality *as a matter of principle* or whether they only suspend them *dependent on situation*. This essay attempts to answer this question using the findings of an ethnographic research project entitled “Negative Classifications” that focused on the native and Turkish populations in two German city neighborhoods. It describes and explains a paradoxical discovery: as social inequalities between ethnic groups disappeared and the principle of equality was broadly achieved, the natives tried all the harder to exclude and denigrate the Turkish population.

I will proceed in four steps. I will first briefly delineate the underlying study and its empirical basis and second, sum up a number of semantic patterns governing the “negative” (meaning pejorative or discriminatory) classifications of the Turkish population, above all of upwardly mobile Turks. In the third section, I will discuss a special belief in ethnic kinship/non-kinship in order to explain why the upwardly mobile members of the Turkish population form the most prominent target of stigmatization. Finally I will address the paradox revealed in section III and stressed in the title of this essay – namely, that social developments and structural changes that are in line with widely accepted norms of ethnic equality promote primordial sentiments which are aimed at ethnic inequality and exclusion.

### *I. The “negative classifications” research project*

The research project, which I carried out with Sighard Neckel and Ina Walter at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt am Main,<sup>6</sup> focused on the semantics and social uses of derogatory designations of the German and the Turkish populations. Between 2002 and 2005 we examined both the exclusionary effects of these negative classifications and the related social conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Our study had an ethnographic orientation and applied a methodological approach based on *grounded theory*.<sup>8</sup> It was conducted in two socially disadvantaged neighborhoods in German cities.

<sup>6</sup> The study was part of the research association “Disintegration Processes” coordinated by Wilhelm Heitmeyer and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the theoretical background and the results of the study, see

NECKEL 2003; SUTTERLÜTY and NECKEL 2006. The arguments and findings presented here are based on my new book: SUTTERLÜTY 2010.

<sup>8</sup> GLASER and STRAUSS 1967; STRAUSS and CORBIN 1990.

The first area was located in Barren,<sup>9</sup> a city in Germany's Ruhr region with about 125 000 residents. *Barren-Ost*, the specific area under study, is a traditional working-class neighborhood with roughly 13 500 inhabitants. It is plagued by the structural problems that have cropped up throughout the Ruhr region since the decline in coal mining. Barren-Ost is generally seen as an area of social tension and conflict. In May 2004, it had an unemployment rate of 16,9 percent, with 9,9 percent of the resident population on welfare (*Sozialhilfe*). At this time, non-German nationals made up 10,6 percent of the population. Although this was just slightly higher than the average for the entire city, Barren-Ost is nevertheless perceived as a neighborhood where Turkish migrants have an exceptionally strong influence. One reason for this perception, which runs counter to the actual statistical data, is that there are more mosques than in other city districts and Turks own businesses at highly visible locations.

The second area under study, *Iderstadt*, is situated in the southern German city of Raisfurth, which has a population of more than 325 000. Iderstadt is also a former working-class neighborhood, and its 19 000 residents include a high percentage of socially disadvantaged groups. In mid-2004, the jobless rate in Iderstadt was 13,8 percent, which was high for the region, and there was also a large proportion (11,8 percent) of welfare recipients. The district has a highly heterogeneous ethnic makeup: in May 2004, non-German nationals represented 42,7 percent of the population. In terms of the objective statistics, this substantially higher share of migrants marks Iderstadt's biggest difference to Barren-Ost. Iderstadt is described in two contrasting ways: on the one hand, residents and non-residents alike often portray it as a colorful multicultural neighborhood or, with a touch of social romanticism, as the "Raisfurth Bronx". At the same time, it is generally believed to be a hotbed of social problems, an area whose social equilibrium is jeopardized by the high percentage of socially disadvantaged groups and the ethnically heterogeneous population.

The data pool was acquired by "theoretical sampling"<sup>10</sup> and can be described as follows. Between September 2002 and August 2004 we repeatedly observed "natural" situations in which members of various social groups communicated directly with one another or spoke collectively about others. In addition, we conducted 45 interviews

<sup>9</sup> We have changed the names of places and proper nouns to preserve anonymity.

<sup>10</sup> GLASER and STRAUSS 1967, pp. 45-77.

with individuals and 6 group discussions, the latter involving unemployed persons, active members of church congregations, and representatives of sports and migrant associations. Finally, we supplemented this data by collecting and analyzing written documents such as articles and letters to the editor in local newspapers.

In terms of ethnic affiliation, we concentrated chiefly on the German and Turkish populations.<sup>11</sup> We had pragmatic research reasons for focusing on Turkish migrants, but these were not the only ones. In both areas, Turkish migrants were frequently stigmatized, and in both they constituted what was by far the largest group of non-German nationals. As of May 2004, 47 percent of all foreigners in Barren-Ost were Turkish nationals, and in Iderstadt the figure was 44 percent. Including Turks who have taken on German citizenship, individuals of Turkish origin made up between 7 and 8 percent of the population in Barren-Ost and around 25 percent in Iderstadt.<sup>12</sup>

## *II. The semantics of negative classification*

One of the findings of our study was that, in both Barren-Ost and Iderstadt, ethnic affiliation represents what Everett Hughes calls an individual's "master status".<sup>13</sup> The factor determining mutual perceptions in everyday neighborhood relations is ethnicity, whether German or non-German (which in our case meant Turkish). Other characteristics appear to play a subordinate role. Evaluations of other traits, especially those based on aspects of vertical inequality, depend on the individual's ethnic affiliation which acts as a kind of filter for additional classifications.

One striking finding is that, of the classification patterns we observed, a large number target upwardly mobile Turks, successful Turkish businesspeople, and the migrant organizations active in local politics. They are thus directed against a social type that Jörg Hüttermann portrays as "foreigners on the advance".<sup>14</sup> Because they

<sup>11</sup> The terms "German" and "Turkish" are self-assessments by the persons under study and not always identical with nationality. German nationals of Turkish descent usually define themselves as both Turks and as members of a Turkish community. To some extent, this is surely the outcome of

the persistent ethnic classification practices of the native German population.

<sup>12</sup> The quantitative data mentioned in this section come from the statistics offices of the cities of Barren and Raisfurth. All data are from May or June 2004.

<sup>13</sup> HUGHES 1971, p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> HÜTTERMANN 2000.

are specifically relevant to the subject of this essay, these classification patterns will be described in the following section, and I will exclude those that members of the Turkish community direct against their German neighbors.

The German population uses four patterns of negative classification to belittle upwardly mobile residents of Turkish origin:

*a) A Turkish-style Protestant work ethic.* In Barren-Ost as well as in Iderstadt, German individuals repeatedly spoke of the hard-working and self-sacrificing lifestyle of the Turkish population, saying their behavior was marked by family discipline and frugality. In other words, Germans made out a “Turkish-style Protestant work ethic”.<sup>15</sup> In their view, a central characteristic of the Turkish population is its inner-worldly asceticism coupled with a strong focus on professional and economic life – which Max Weber once ascribed to the Calvinists and other branches of Protestantism during the birth of modern capitalism.<sup>16</sup> The Germans view this ethic, which has always been visible in “classes rising from a lowly status”,<sup>17</sup> as a traditional yet disappearing element of their own history, one that gives the Turkish business community an undeserved competitive edge. In this logic, Turkish business proprietors and building owners are backward yet dangerous competitors. Attributes such as work ethic, asceticism and frugality are not generally judged negatively. The negative assessment of Turkish businesspeople arises from the fact that they are seen as having “an excess” of the described work ethic.

*b) An expansionist desire to take over.* In both areas under study, we also encountered negative classifications that depict Turkish migrants – particularly businesspeople and active mosque associations – as making expansionist claims to power: “They want to take control everywhere” is how German residents expressed this second classification pattern. Through such designations, Germans not only criticize the “takeover” of what they view as their traditional turf. They also accuse successful Turkish businesspeople and migrant associations of being driven by a desire to seize space. Furthermore, the actions of individual Turkish migrants are projected onto the entire Turkish population.<sup>18</sup> Although the Turks’ “desire to take over” is evaluated negatively, the Germans do in fact admire their entrepreneurial

<sup>15</sup> This is a slight modification of a term used by WOHLRAB-SAHR 1998.

<sup>16</sup> WEBER [1904-05] 1976.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>18</sup> KARRER 2002 arrives at findings that are partially comparable, pp. 107 ff.

courage. Once again, criticism is leveled only at an excess, but it is easy to see how it leads to clear-cut friend/enemy distinctions. Whereas in the first classification pattern the “takeover” appears to be an unintentional side-effect of an inherited orientation toward action, in the second, upwardly mobile Turks are accused of a conscious intention to expand at the expense of native residents and a desire to relegate them to the sidelines in a cut-throat competition for resources.

*c) Shady dealings.* A third classification pattern targets businesspeople and property owners of Turkish origin whom the German residents accuse of making money by illegal means. In other words, they are portrayed as criminals.<sup>19</sup> Since this pattern is based on a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate competitors, the “shady dealings” designation aims to symbolically exclude these individuals from economic competition. In Iderstadt, for example, there were widespread efforts to criminalize Turkish businesses by a local initiative and its supporters, who openly and by innuendo gave migrants – particularly the Turkish population – the blame for noise, dirt and crime. Activists in this initiative called Turkish businesses “meeting places for thieves and fences” and accused family-run Turkish businesses of illegally pocketing funds from public business development programs that initiative members assumed were inaccessible to German businesspeople. Apart from this initiative, we repeatedly heard talk of dubious Turkish businesses or “money laundering”. Similar categorizations could be observed among the German population in Barren-Ost.

*d) Rational parasitism.* The classifications in the fourth group can best be described as “rational parasitism”.<sup>20</sup> When people are classified as “parasites”, they are symbolically excluded from respectable society. The parasite is the antithesis to the upright individual who claims only what he is entitled to. The parasite semantics in Barren-Ost revolved around politically active migrant groups – particularly the local mosque associations and the Foreigners’ Advisory Board (*Ausländerbeirat*)<sup>21</sup> – which, among other things, wanted to have a say in the way funds were awarded from “Soziale Stadt Nordrhein-Westfalen”, a district revitalization program that included the area of Barren-Ost. Once the suggestions from the Foreigners’ Advisory Board and

<sup>19</sup> HÜTTERMANN 2000, pp. 278 ff.

<sup>20</sup> ZILIAN and MOSER 1989.

<sup>21</sup> The Foreigners’ Advisory Board is an elected body with a counseling function in local politics. It is also involved in decision-making processes that affect migrants.

the mosque associations were made public, they came under fire, with opponents arguing that the Turkish population had previously shown no interest in the district. Only now, when there was “something to be had”, were the Turks making “impudent demands”. During these conflicts, explicit mention was made of “parasites” on several occasions. “Rational parasitism” in this sense refers to an allegedly strategic participation in district processes, one that is oriented toward personal gain and takes advantage of opportunities for one’s own group.

At this point we must address a pressing question: why are upward mobility, economic success and political influence in the Turkish community such a major problem for the German population?

### *III. The belief in “ethnic kinship”*

My thesis is that a belief in ethnic affiliation as a form of kinship plays a crucial role in the stigmatization of the economically successful and politically active segments of the Turkish population. By kinship I mean the German residents’ essentialist idea that they are “related” to their own ethnic group and “not related” to the Turkish population.<sup>22</sup> This can be called a *deep symbolic dimension of social inequality*. It is “deep” insofar as the groups are not aware that they perceive interethnic relations through the lens of kinship. It occurs, as it were, behind their backs. Negative classifications, by contrast, represent the explicit semantics of ethnic designations. The kinship model of ethnicity *manifests itself* in its effects and inexorably asserts itself through human action. The underlying, largely implicit convictions do not reflect objective relations among ethnic groups. Rather, they represent a pattern of social perception that draws on a compelling interpretation – a “belief in blood relationship”, as Max Weber expresses it.<sup>23</sup>

This can be shown by two blood drives held in the rooms of a Turkish mosque congregation in Barren-Ost in September 2002 and May 2003. These drives were initiated by the Foreigners’ Advisory Board in Barren, but conducted by the German Red Cross.<sup>24</sup> The

<sup>22</sup> This is an empiric statement referring to Germans, but it is not meant to imply that this phenomenon is specific to them, as there is no indication of that. See, for example,

MYRDAL 1962, pp. 97 ff. and SIMPSON 2000.

<sup>23</sup> WEBER [1922] 1978, p. 393.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed analysis, see SUTTERLÜTY 2006.



Foreigners' Advisory Board and the mosque congregation conceived of the blood drives as part of an *integration strategy*. Mr. Kedi, chairman of the Foreigners' Advisory Board and member of the mosque congregation, put it this way: "We're part of this society and we would like to participate in all aspects of this society with all the attendant rights and duties, whether it is blood drives or anything else". A generous act by the Turkish minority was intended to convince the German population that the groups represented by the Foreigners' Advisory Board were full-fledged members of society (the German residents were also invited to participate in the blood drives, but they did not turn out in large numbers, though some advertising had been done).

From the outset, the Barren blood drives were overdetermined. The mosque congregation did not simply want to give blood like other donors. It wanted the native majority population in the neighborhood to understand the *symbolic meaning* of its actions. The integration strategies behind these drives were clearly tailored to the local context and had little to do with the anonymous recipients of the blood.<sup>25</sup> The objective was to have the German residents accept the Turkish minority into their circle of relatives. The members of the mosque congregation expected a counter-gift for giving blood: recognition of affiliation.

The initial blood drive, which the mosque congregation regarded as the first of a series of regular biannual blood donation events on its premises, encountered curious preliminary difficulties. When the responsible parties at the congregation offered to hold a drive, the Blood Donor Service of the German Red Cross repeatedly expressed interest and promised to look into the matter but never followed through. At the same time the Red Cross was running advertisements in local newspapers encouraging people to donate blood because of low reserves. In addition, the Blood Donor Service was looking for new offices in Barren-Ost. After a great deal of negotiation, the Foreigners' Advisory Board was finally able to arrange a meeting with the Red Cross in the mosque congregation's rooms. Unbeknownst to the guests, Mr. Kedi took the liberty of inviting the press. From that point on, things fell into place rather quickly and the earliest possible date was arranged. The Red Cross was put under considerable pressure to accept the offer from the mosque, and the sudden change

<sup>25</sup> TITMUS 1970 provides a fascinating study of this topic.

of heart cannot obscure the fact that it had reservations about the drives and wanted to avoid them.

In fact, the two drives ended in what was an affront to the mosque congregation. A Red Cross doctor informed the mosque that the blood from the first drive had been “poured down the drain”, thereby bringing the drives to an abrupt halt. The Blood Donor Service of the Red Cross explained that it had been obliged to destroy the blood from the first drive because of the Turkish donors’ allegedly poor German language skills: for the sake of the blood recipients, it needed to be sure that the donors had filled out the forms correctly. The arguments put forward by the Red Cross were based on legal regulations governing all blood donations and reflected a medical ethic that attempts to minimize health risks for the patients receiving the blood donations. However, even if this argumentation has some plausibility, there are three points that cannot be reconciled with the Red Cross’s explanatory logic.

First, there was no need for the Red Cross to give members of the mosque congregation the degrading information that the blood they had given at the first drive had been thrown away. When we questioned the medical director of the responsible Blood Donor Service, he admitted that it had not been necessary to destroy *all* the blood donations – as in fact had occurred – since every blood bag bore information on the donor’s German skills. The disposal of all the blood is the second inconsistency in the Red Cross’s logic, one which neither the medical director nor any other Red Cross staff member could adequately explain. The third contradiction in the Red Cross’s argument is that a number of Turkish donors who were rejected at the second drive had already given blood several times in the past and even had blood donor cards! So it seems that their German skills were only judged as poor for a drive taking place in a Turkish mosque.

The reasons why the “Turkish blood”, as it was called on several occasions, was ultimately spurned can be summarized as follows. The rejection of the blood was based on fears that members of the mosque congregation wanted to enter into a symbolic “kinship” with the German population and become full members of local society by exchanging blood. This reveals two different aspects of the concept of ethnic *kinship*:

In the first place, the term refers to the diffuse yet powerful assumption that a common biological ancestry exists within a person’s ethnic group. The Barren blood drives tapped into this belief. The mosque congregation took up the idea of kinship when it endeavored

to acquire full membership in local society through a transfer of blood. Its desire to redraw ethnic boundaries by mixing blood confirms the idea. That the Red Cross also subscribed to this naturalistic view is shown by its efforts to prevent this redefinition of ethnic boundaries. However, this does not mean that the Red Cross espouses a racist ideology. The ethnic model of kinship does not constitute an explicit ideology and cannot be equated with what is commonly understood as “racism”. As a category, racism is simply too coarse and imprecise to adequately describe what motivated the behavior of the German actors in the Barren blood drives. It is more fruitful to consider a second aspect of the ethnic model of kinship, one that cannot at all be grasped by the concept of racism.

What was at stake at the blood drives is not only “kinship” in the sense of a community based on common biological origin, but also in the sense of a quasi-family system of interaction and solidarity that extends far beyond the framework of essentialist or biological concepts.<sup>26</sup> The Barren blood drives failed because acceptance of “Turkish blood” would have encouraged reciprocal exchange relations between the German and Turkish populations. Underlying the intended transfer of blood was the idea that Turks and Germans would be responsible for one another regardless of ethnic affiliation. The Germans had to prevent this from happening in order to reserve for their group the reciprocity expectations and solidarity obligations that characterize gift exchanges among relatives.<sup>27</sup> The Turkish blood donors and their ethnic group were excluded from the domain in which a quasi-family morality prevailed. A truism for nearly all cultures is that people assume greater responsibility for their own families and also have greater obligations to them. When this type of family morality dominates interethnic perceptions, exchange relations based on the concept of solidarity must be restricted exclusively to members of one’s own ethnic group. This principle of solidarity, which is oriented toward an idealized view of family interaction, blends with the idea of shared blood. The notion of ethnic consanguinity goes hand in hand with a familistic morality of reciprocity. This twofold idea of kinship led to the “Turkish blood” being rejected in Barren-Ost. Furthermore, it was the clandestine source of the negative classifications of upwardly mobile individuals and groups in the Turkish community.

<sup>26</sup> MÜLLER 1984, pp. 249 ff.

<sup>27</sup> SABEAN 1998, pp. 127 ff.; GODELIER [1996] 1999, pp. 207 ff.

This tacitly active kinship model of ethnicity prompts the native population to fight any ethnically neutral distribution of material goods and to keep out-groups from becoming affiliated with the local community. In the logic of this model, solidarity must first be reserved for a person's ethnic in-group, which is conceived as a union of relatives and associated with "primordial sentiments" of affiliation.<sup>28</sup> Equal participation by migrants does not fit into this particularistic mold. The upwardly mobile section of the Turkish population creates a specific interethnic exchange problem and spurs the native population to look for behavioral features worthy of criticism. This promotes the negative classifications of upwardly mobile Turks described in the previous chapter. The deep symbolic structure of the kinship model is one of the most important *generative principles* of these classifications.

Despite the familistic allegiance underlying the negative designations, the dictum expressed by Donald R. Horowitz – "the language of ethnicity is the language of kinship"<sup>29</sup> – was not validated by our observations, at least not in the sense that ethnic groups use kinship semantics when communicating with each other. The kinship-based pattern of perception is not linked to a specific linguistic code similar to what Horowitz discovered among African and Asian populations. The surface structure of the explicit classifications of upwardly mobile Turks is not textured by kinship-related semantics. The powerful effect of the familistic understanding of ethnicity results from its very invisibility. This understanding of ethnicity informs the structure of interethnic designations without constituting an independent classification semantics. When explicit classification patterns are used, this model produces corresponding semantic footprints and at times manifests itself in individual phrases that are part of a "language game"<sup>30</sup> that distinguishes between relatives and non-relatives.

The special relevance of the deep kinship structure of interethnic relations lies in the fact that its powerful effects resurface in situations that have nothing to do with blood transfers or similar exchanges. Specifically, the deep symbolic structure causes the rejection and defamation of equal social and political participation by the Turkish population. Its quasi-family morality, based on the idea of reciprocity, is the driving force behind the negative classifications of the upwardly mobile section of the Turkish population.

<sup>28</sup> SHILS 1957; GEERTZ 1963, pp. 109 ff.

<sup>29</sup> HOROWITZ 1985, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> WITTGENSTEIN 1953, paragraphs 7, 23 ff.

This can be seen, for example, in the way the majority of Germans responded to the political engagement of Turkish actors in Barren-Ost, whom they classified as strategically shrewd “parasites”. When the Foreigners’ Advisory Board requested a seat on the steering committee of the abovementioned urban renewal program, Germans in the neighborhood claimed that the Turks were making “impudent demands” (chapter II). At a meeting convened to discuss these “demands”, which were voiced by both the Foreigners’ Advisory Board and various other Turkish groups in the neighborhood, one of the organizers of the event, a councilwoman for the Christian Democratic Union, exclaimed: “They want our German money!” With this remark, the councilwoman, herself a neighborhood resident, attributed a parasitic behavior to the Turkish population and its representatives and attempted to deny them the right to participate in the “blessings” of the urban renewal plan. Since a broad cross-section of the Turkish population pays taxes, one can hardly say that public funds for the program are “German” in an ethnic sense. Aside from this, the councilwoman took for granted that the interests of a German group had to be served first and that the demands of Turkish associations could be ignored. Her remark about “German money”, which was roundly applauded, reflects the kinship-related thought pattern described above. It was driven by the implicit conviction that the money had to remain in “our” family and “we” are not responsible for others.

The laments that attribute an “expansionist desire to take over” to successful residents of Turkish descent follow the same pattern (chapter II). Criticism of this sort was leveled at Turks who ran local businesses or owned buildings that had previously been in German hands. Even the Turkish soccer team, which took over a traditional German club that had gone bankrupt, was accused of wanting to seize space. For a broad section of the German population, ethnicity seems to play a decisive role in the way economic prosperity and social mobility are judged: the only upwardly mobile individuals who were subject to ostracizing, malicious gossip were non-Germans, particularly Turks. The German population in both Barren-Ost and Iderstadt complained about a hostile seizure of land and charged the Turkish residents with making strategic plans to take over what they considered their own terrain. The structural logic of the ethnic model of kinship also reveals itself in this behavior: the German residents did not want to accept the fact that their own family-defined power base was eroding and “strangers” were benefiting. An ethnically expanded nepotism dominated the neighborhood.

These two examples illustrate that it is crucial to analyze the “belief in ethnic kinship” not only because it produces negative classifications, but also because it *symbolically* excludes the Turkish population from equal participation. The idea of “ethnic kinship” is the reason that negative classifications and exclusionary micropolitics are directed primarily against individuals of Turkish descent who have already successfully integrated.

With these findings in mind, it is now time to address the “paradox of ethnic equality” mentioned in the title.

#### *IV. The paradox of ethnic equality*

In both areas under study, we encountered almost no one who explicitly disputed the idea that different ethnic groups in the population should, in principle, have equal access to central functional areas of society and should be able to acquire all the necessary resources. The residents have broadly accepted the normative idea of “structural integration”<sup>31</sup> that is independent of ethnic affiliation. Hardly anyone challenges the principle of fundamental equality as reflected in the view that all permanent residents of a country – irrespective of their ethnic origins or affiliation – should be given equal opportunities for acquiring material resources, should have equal access to social institutions and should enjoy social and political rights. With only a few exceptions, the native residents of Barren-Ost and Iderstadt do not favor an unequal order structured according to ethnic criteria. Rather, they consider such an order absolutely illegitimate as a normative standard for guiding the development of society.

On the level of surface semantics, the negative classifications that Germans use to define their Turkish neighbors by no means contradict the equality principle of structural integration. Rather, such classifications presuppose its validity. It is important to note that these classifications *do not* express the view that migrants should not possess social rights, may not make demands on local politics, and are not entitled to strive for improved material participation. Rather, the native residents merely criticize certain types of behavior in their Turkish neighbors that would also draw criticism in other people: an

<sup>31</sup> GEIßLER 2004, pp. 288 f.

all-too-ascetic work ethic, an aggressive desire to gain control, parasitic attitudes and criminal dealings. A fundamental assumption of equality and an internalized ban on ethnic discrimination can be derived *ex negativo* from the contents of such classifications.

At times the German residents of the two neighborhoods even explicitly emphasized the undisputed validity of equal participatory and access rights. The chairman of the Iderstadt trade association stated quite unequivocally that the Turkish residents had “every right” to run businesses and purchase property. He said this even though he complained that the increased transfer of companies, sales space and real estate to Turks ran contrary to the business interests of small and medium-sized German companies. And he said this even though, resorting to the classifications just mentioned, he let drop that there were a number of reasons for reporting them to the trade supervisory authority. After approval of the Soziale Stadt Nordrhein-Westfalen revitalization program (and before the conflicts discussed above) local interest groups requested the Turkish associations in Barren-Ost to develop “ideas and proposals” that could be passed on to the Foreigners’ Advisory Board and incorporated into the political decision-making process on awarding funds. It is through such requests that the principle of equality is implemented.

The big “but” that follows acknowledgments of egalitarian participation is typically unrelated to ethnicity. In the logic of the explicit classification practices of Germans, ethnic affiliation is not the reason that Turkish businesspeople and politically active migrant groups are viewed suspiciously and stigmatized. The autochthonous population casts opprobrium on them because they allegedly pursue shady business deals or because their political activism aims to secure an advantage only for their own “parasitic” clientele. It is the observed or perceived behavioral characteristics and attitudes that result in negative classifications, without their internal semantics being ethnically determined or applicable only to Turks.

Despite all other existing differences, members of the German population do not regard their Turkish neighbors as a fundamentally different class of people to whom they must apply different normative standards than they do to fellow Germans. Who would not want to see a normative achievement and increased civility in the broad acceptance of the idea that all ethnic groups should have equal access to resources and institutions that facilitate structural integration? This integrative norm is the reason that Turks in city neighborhoods such as Barren-Ost and Iderstadt are not the target of negative

classifications *because they are Turks*. Rather, they are viewed negatively due to perceived behavioral characteristics and attitudes that are frowned upon by the German population in general.

But the catch is this: the German residents primarily discern such “symptoms” among Turkish individuals, groups and organizations. In a kind of “self-fulfilling prophecy”,<sup>32</sup> they look for and find those types of behavior and attitudes among Turks that discredit them. Furthermore, the German population tends to project the misconduct attributed to Turkish individuals onto the entire ethnic group. Individual vices and offenses, which are sometimes based on plausible observations and sometimes on mere suspicions, are translated into a “tribal stigma”.<sup>33</sup>

Consequently, the normative principle of ethnic equality exists only in the subjunctive mood: *Were* the Turkish migrants different from how they really are, or how they appear to the native population, *then* they could count on full recognition of their equality and full access to local markets and arenas of politics. The German residents of the neighborhoods under study repeatedly reined in the equality principle by denying their Turkish neighbors equal rights and equal entitlement to participation, access and affiliation on a case-by-case basis. This primarily affects Turks who have liberated themselves from the subaltern guest-worker status of their forebears, succeeded in climbing to a higher rung on the social ladder and gained the ability to articulate themselves publicly, thereby ending a state of political non-representation.

Herein lies the paradox: the equality principle, once it is put into practice, leads to the disparagement and exclusion of the people who are positively affected by it. This paradox is inherent in the question posed by Claus Offe as to whether native populations are capable of the abstraction needed to recognize the legal and political equality of people of different ethnic origins.<sup>34</sup> His skepticism is based on the observation that equality is felt to be “one demand too many”, particularly by those who have been adversely affected by the modernization process and who are threatened by the loss of their social standing. According to Offe, this is why such individuals demand a naturalistic “insurance of difference”.<sup>35</sup> The results of our study confirm the existence of such a mechanism. When migrants are granted and exercise political rights, when they increasingly

<sup>32</sup> MERTON 1949, pp. 179 ff.

<sup>33</sup> GOFFMAN 1963, pp. 4 ff.

<sup>34</sup> OFFE 1996, p. 280.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.



participate in economic life, new exclusionary practices are provoked that thwart an interethnic exchange among equals.

The acknowledged principle of equality is turned on its head. The paradox can be stated as follows: an idea that represents normative progress over earlier eras produces unintended side effects once it is implemented – side effects to which it is diametrically opposed.<sup>36</sup> Manifested in social reality, the norm of ethnic equality produces negative classifications that bring about the opposite of its intended goal. These classifications promote greater inequalities and activate ideas of a natural, unbridgeable ethnic difference that cannot be conjured away by any formal principle of equality. In those areas where it is implemented, the norm of equality runs up against primordial ideas of ethnic affiliation and foreignness. These are the hidden source of the paradox analyzed here.

The largely invisible model of ethnic kinship<sup>37</sup> functions as an underlying symbolic and justificatory order for unequal access and restricted participatory rights for migrants. The belief in kinship goes against the civil principle of equality, which is not only of fundamental importance for the institutions in an ethnically heterogeneous and pluralistic society, but also – as has been shown – continues to be widely accepted by the population on the level of explicit attitudes. There are situations in which the idea of ethnic kinship between individuals is invested with a vaguely biological meaning, as was the

<sup>36</sup> This reflects the concept of paradox as defined by HARTMANN and HONNETH 2006, pp. 47 f.; see also SYMONDS and PUDSEY 2008, pp. 223 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Max Weber has rightly emphasized the artificial and socially contrived nature of ethnic group formation and affiliation: “Almost any kind of similarity or contrast of physical type and of habits can induce the belief that affinity or disaffinity exists between groups that attract or repel each other.” According to Weber, the specifically ethnic dimension of such constructs lies in the “belief in affinity or disaffinity of blood”. The defining feature of ethnic groups is thus “a subjective belief in their common descent”. Viewed from a sociological perspective, Weber shows that ethnic feelings of affiliation can arise from a vast number of different phenotypic, linguistic, ethical and behavioral traits, as well as from the experience or memory of a common social, political and historical destiny. At the same time – and this is often forgotten in the discourse on

ethnicity – Weber emphasized that, in the consciousness of social actors, the semantic core of common ethnicity is founded on a supposed “blood relationship” (*Blutsge-meinschaft*) – that is, on primordial ideas. Without them, ethnic consciousness would disintegrate into a vast array of perceived physical, cultural, historical and political similarities and differences. See WEBER [1922] 1978, pp. 388 f. and 393 f.

From the perspective of a neutral observer one might be able to say that “there is no such thing as ethnicity”. However, what looks absurd to the observer may serve as an effective fiction and the basis of action for the actors in social reality. These actors do not necessarily lead their lives according to the constructivist parameters of sociological terms and reflections. Primordialism, as it applies to their internal viewpoint, must therefore be sharply distinguished from a sociological or anthropological primordialism. ELLER and COUGHLAN 1993, among many others, confuse these perspectives.

case during the blood drives in Barren-Ost. However, no matter how strong the biological connotations may be in particular cases, this belief in ethnic kinship achieves its social relevance by combining the idea of common heritage with a familistic solidarity with one's group.

The native residents see their power base in the neighborhood threatened, and the partial leveling of interethnic inequalities strengthens their conviction that their own ethnic group, conceived as a kinship, deserves their primary solidarity and must retain the right to higher social status. The effectiveness of this primordial, archaic-seeming idea is based on the fact that it does not reveal itself on the semantic surface. It owes its power to a "misrecognition".<sup>38</sup> This is the only way that the belief in ethnic kinship can render the principle of equality invalid without explicitly challenging it.

This is why Rainer Geißler expresses only a half-truth when he states that the normative concept of "*structural* integration" – which focuses on the idea of ethnic equality – is "undisputed"<sup>39</sup> in Germany. In fact, this concept encounters resistance, at least on the level of everyday interaction in ethnically mixed and socially disadvantaged neighborhoods. The social actors' beliefs in primordial affiliation and ethnically differentiated solidarity duties undermine the idea of equal access to the various functional areas and institutions of society. As a result, the norm of equality is eroded in the practice of interethnic classification. The only domain that is explicitly contested in Germany may be that of "*cultural* integration"<sup>40</sup> since here the largely dominant principle of cultural assimilation runs up against migrants demanding that they be able to draw on and find recognition in their link to their culture of origin. A number of conflicts examined in our study were also directly bound up in the question of whether cultural difference and structural integration are compatible.

But my analysis of the belief in ethnic kinship shows that entitlement to equal treatment in structural integration is often challenged in everyday actions. This implies that the problem of integration in ethnically mixed neighborhoods begins even *before* the oft-debated question of how much cultural assimilation is required to integrate migrants and where the right to cultural difference begins

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Bourdieu uses the term "misrecognition" to draw attention to the fact that gift exchanges only work on the basis of an illusion: The expectation of reciprocity must not be recognized, or else the gift would

become something different – a selfish act based on the expectation of a counter-gift. See BOURDIEU [1980] 1990, pp. 104 ff.

<sup>39</sup> GEIßLER 2004, p. 288.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289 ff.

and ends. In these urban areas, which provide migrants with one of the most important arenas for social integration and participation, the normative idea that structural integration should not vary according to ethnic affiliation is undermined by a primordial counter-model. The creation of equality leads to counter-mobilizations that are ultimately founded on a symbolic order of ethnic inequality. Such a symbolic order undercuts fundamental norms of civility, first and foremost the norm by which people abstract from ethnic differences in the struggle for access rights and participation thereby imposing restrictions on themselves. The symbolic order of ethnic inequality is the reason that stigmatization targets those members of the Turkish population that have completed the process of structural integration and are not all that different culturally.

The primordial element provides the key to understanding why the native residents can assume that they share interests with their own ethnic group and why they see these interests negatively affected by the upward mobility of individuals of Turkish origin. The sharp line that the German residents of Barren-Ost and Iderstadt draw between themselves and Turks can hardly be explained by opposing group interests or favorable opportunity structures for political or economic mobilization benefiting one's own group.<sup>41</sup> It is only in light of an imagined common heritage that upwardly mobile Turks appear as a problem to the German population. The Turks threaten the unexpressed, unquestioned existence of ethnic inequalities – inequalities that the Germans believe should be preserved and because of which they regard the integration of immigrants into the center of society as undesirable – despite statements to the contrary. The German population is held in thrall by a clan-like thinking. However, even if the achievement of ethnic equality provokes such thinking, it certainly does not invalidate the legitimacy of the norm that made this possible. Rather, the norm of ethnic equality can always be used by other social actors to effectively criticize the primordial belief in kinship.

*Translated from the German by  
Adam Blauhut in cooperation with  
the author.*

<sup>41</sup> For an essay that explains ethnic phenomena by linking primordial bonds and interest-driven resource mobilization, see MCKAY 1982.

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### Résumé

Selon les résultats d'une étude ethnographique menée en Allemagne dans deux quartiers urbains, les Allemands affirment leur attachement à l'égalité ethnique mais stigmatisent avec des termes classificatoires négatifs, ceux de leurs voisins turcs qui réalisent une mobilité sociale ascendante. Ce faisant ils sapent la norme antiraciste sans la mettre explicitement en question. On tente d'expliquer ce paradoxe par la conviction répandue de l'importance primordiale de la parenté qui fondamentalement a partie liée avec un ordre symbolique de l'inégalité ethnique.

*Mots clés* : Egalité ethnique ; Inégalité sociale ; Ethnicité ; Sentiments primordiaux ; Classification ; Normes ; Paradoxe.

### Zusammenfassung

Die Ergebnisse einer in zwei dt. Stadtteilen durchgeführten ethnographischen Studie zeigen, dass die Deutschen an der ethnischen Gleichheit festhalten, aber ihre sozialaufsteigenden türkischen Mitbürger mit negativen Klassifikationen stigmatisieren. Auf diese Art und Weise unterhöheln sie die antirassistische Norm, ohne sie ausdrücklich in Frage zu stellen. Dieser Widerspruch erklärt sich durch die Bedeutung der Verwandtschaft, die grundsätzlich mit der symbolischen Stellung der ethnischen Ungleichheit in Verbindung gebracht wird.

*Schlagwörter*: Ethnische Gleichheit; Soziale Ungerechtigkeit; Ethnizität; Hauptgefühle; Klassifizierung; Normen; Paradox.