
Struggling to Integrate the Turkish Migrant Community and German Society

A Psychological Approach

Lennart Keil

ID 300191008

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Dr Taciano L. Milfont

Introduction

In this essay, an attempt will be made at disentangling the factors thwarting integration of Turkish Immigrants in Germany. While for example economical and policy-related developments do exert a decisive influence in this context, the focus of this essay will be on identifying the cultural and social dynamics underlying this conflict. To begin with, the historical development and the current status of the Turkish community in Germany need to be elaborated.

History of the Turkish Migrants in Germany

The establishment of a considerable Turkish community in Germany occurred rather recently with most of the immigration taking place after 1961. At this point in time/history, the German economy was in the midst of its “Wirtschaftswunder”, the *economic miracle* of the 50s and 60s. Employment was abundant and with workers desperately needed, the German and Turkish government signed a *Recruitment Agreement for Labor* allowing Turkish citizens to go to Germany to work. These so called “Gastarbeiter”, literally translated as *guest workers*, were predominantly men employed in manual labour jobs (Verdugo & Mueller, 2008). Within a few years, despite the fact that similar agreements existed with e.g. Italy, the Turkish community outgrew the other migrant communities in Germany. When a recession put an end to the high demand for labourers, however, the majority of Turkish “Gastarbeiter” remained in the country due to economic instability in Turkey. Eventually, a second phase of immigration commenced, characterized by the goal of family reunification. Immigration towards Germany has ever since been driven by this motive, with regularly over 50 percent of arriving Turkish immigrants being either family members or future spouses. Nowadays, migrants with Turkish roots in Germany amount to 2.7 million, posing 25 percent of the total migrant population and about 3.5 percent of the total German population (Citlak et al. 2008).

This increasing number of immigrants in itself is of course not a large concern, but a closer look at their living conditions and their relationship towards the rest of the population reveals a number of factors contributing to the development of a perceivable cultural and societal gap.

Indicators of Integration

The qualitatively and quantitatively estimated degree of integration of the Turkish community into German society has proven to be significantly lower than that any other migrant group, especially amongst adolescents and young adults (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2008). For example, unemployment and low economic status are widespread, and low educational levels lead to the apprehension that this is unlikely to change in the near future.

In reports on youth criminality, e.g. by Pfeiffer et al. (2005), another critical aspect emerges as young male Turks are displaying an alarming rate of violent crime. Even if controlled for variables that outline living conditions such as economic status, the statistics indicate that violent behaviour is more common than in any other age- or ethnic group in Germany. For example, over 30 percent report to have used violence before, which is a self-reported measure and therefore possibly still an understatement.

As in many other immigration contexts, a reliable predictor for integration is the actual area of residency. For Turks, an evident ethnic residential segregation exists with up to 40 percent living in urban areas dominated by Turks or other migrant groups (Verdugo & Mueller, 2008). Of course, the relationship between residency and degree of integration can be interpreted in a bidirectional manner, as a progressed integration might just as well lead to an increased likelihood of living outside of Turkish enclaves. Nevertheless, the residential situation itself is an influential factor in the integration formula, not just an outcome.

If used as an indicator for integration, the number of intergroup marriages also signifies a cultural segregation. These close bonds are exceptionally rare, with 98 percent of Turkish women married to a Turkish man and 95 percent of Turkish men married to a Turkish woman. Furthermore, even when the cross-cultural marriage is given a try, the divorce rates are among the highest when compared to other mixed marriages (Verdugo & Mueller, 2008).

All of these integration indicators depict a similar image of the current situation. The Turks and the Germans seem to maintain somewhat parallel societies with distinct boundaries. The overlap of these societies is characterized by conflicts and at best a toleration of the coexistence. In the following, an attempt is made at identifying the reasons for this *status-quo* from the perspective of cross-cultural, social and political psychology.

Disentangling the Conflict

In order to determine whether difficulties in interaction and integration for Germans and Turks can be retraced to underlying cross-cultural differences, it is useful to start by taking a look at the large-scale cross-cultural investigation by Hofstede (2001). Even though it is obvious that these findings cannot simply be transferred to Turks living in Germany, it can be assumed the cultural framework persists as an agent of friction.

When comparing the respective values on the Hofstede's (2001) dimensions, several major dissimilarities are salient. In detail, Turkey has a distinctively higher Power-Distance (PDI), and Uncertainty-Avoidance (UAI) while Germany indicates more orientation towards Individualism (IDV) and slightly higher Masculinity (MAS). This pattern points towards the traditionalist and Islamic orientation of the Turkish culture and it is typical in its differences to a typical "Western" culture, such as Germany. Somewhat surprisingly, MAS is higher in Germany, even though the Turkish culture can be characterized as highly patriarchic (Sev'er, 2001). This is most likely due to the composition of the dimensions in this research. Traditional, patriarchic elements such as arranged marriages, family structure etc. are more likely to be represented in the UAI and PDI dimensions. MAS is lower in Turkey, not signalling egalitarian gender roles, but because the general cultural orientation is slightly more harmonic, hospitable and less confrontational than in Germany. At this point, one could continue extrapolating Hofstede's (2001) findings, enriching the analyses with comparisons to similar studies, such as the GLOBE-Study (House et al., 2004). However, the main gist would remain to be the conclusion that main cross cultural-differences can be outlined along these dimensions.

Eventually, the emphasis one puts on these findings when analysing this conflict should remain limited. Considering the fact that other migrant groups with similar or even stronger cultural deviations are more successfully integrated, it remains questionable whether the extent of cultural variance itself ranks highly amongst the factors driving this conflict. Therefore, in order to further the analysis of the major forces perpetuating this conflict, it is instead necessary to zoom in on its exact historical, social and cultural context and the respective psychological concomitants.

Different Expectations, Different Perceptions

To begin with, it is necessary to take a look at the model of the acculturation process as outlined by Berry (1989). The model categorizes acculturation attitudes along two dimensions: *maintenance of cultural heritage* and *maintenance of relationships with other groups*. Depending how individuals emphasize these goals classifies their approach to cultural encounters. From the perspective of a nondominant group specifically, *integration* refers to trying to maintain cultural heritage while being interested in close contact to the dominant group. *Assimilation* implies close relationship with the dominant group and neglecting one's cultural heritage, even to the point of absorbing the dominant culture. *Separation* on the other hand describes a stance where the relationship to the dominant culture is not valued, while cultural maintenance is prioritized. Finally, *marginalization* defines an acculturation attitude characterized by a renunciation of one's cultural heritage without an aspiration to maintain a relationship with the dominant group.

In the context of this model, it is crucial to shed light on the interplay of social variables such as group identification, group interaction and discrimination with the acculturation attitudes of Turks and Germans. Applying Berry's (1989) model to the specific background of Turks in Germany, Piontkowski et al. (2000, 2002) provide a framework for investigating the influence of these social phenomena on acculturation.

The first step in this approach is to look at the different acculturation attitudes favoured by Germans and Turks as measured by Piontkowski et al. (2000). For Germans, the acculturation attitude seen as most appropriate for Turks in Germany is *integration* in 65 percent of the cases, followed by *assimilation* with 25 percent. The German participants barely exhibit *marginalization* and even less *separation* attitudes. Fifty percent of the Turkish participants, on the other hand, endorse a *separation* attitude and only 25 percent an *integration* attitude. Furthermore, 20 percent are categorized as *marginalizationist*, and 15 percent as *assimilationist*.

If this attitudinal pattern is representative for the whole population, it clearly pinpoints one of the core challenges in this conflict. According to the *Concordance Model of Acculturation*, "the greater the mismatch in attitudes, the more threatening and less enriching the intergroup situation will be perceived to be" (Piontkowski et al. 2002). In this case, the majority of the Turkish sample endorsed exactly the acculturation attitude that Germans believed to be least appropriate for them, a mismatch unlike any other of the host-immigrant combinations examined. As it seems, the willingness to accept host-culture influence is very

limited while maintaining cultural heritage is absolute priority. The attitudes of Turkish individuals on these dimensions summarize many perceived difficulties concerning their situation in Germany. Therefore, a further understanding of the social processes behind these attitudes can be reached by incorporating several social concepts into the analysis. To do so, the extent to which these factors predict acculturation attitude for Turks can be used as a guideline (Piontkowski et al., 2000).

To begin with, the role of social identity plays a prominent role in this conflict as much as in most other intergroup conflicts. More specifically, social identity theory in this case is of course a matter of cultural or national identity. Not surprisingly, most Turks report difficulties identifying with Germany while maintaining a strong identification with Turkey and their surrounding Turkish community (Verdugo & Mueller, 2008). This indicates a persisting psychological detachment between the two groups, which is predominantly explainable through perceived impermeability of group boundaries and perceived dissimilarity. Growing up and living in residential enclaves means the groups are always experienced as coexisting while barely overlapping, which continuously reinforces the categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Furthermore, large but nondominant social or ethnological outgroups are subject to more discrimination from the dominant ingroup than other, less distinguished outgroups. The main reason for this is the fact that a larger nondominant group poses more of a ‘threat’ to the dominant group (Stephan, 1985). According to social identity theory, the existence of a considerable ‘rival’ is pressuring the dominant group to distance itself more clearly from the others, hoping to promote identification within the ingroup. Clearly, this is a more abstract aspect, but combined with the actual criminality rates, low levels of education and low economic status it leads to significantly higher discrimination of German-Turks (Jerusalem, 1989).

A Self-fulfilling Prophecy

A dynamic in the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy seems to be at work, where challenging circumstances limit the immigrants’ abilities to become a ‘healthy’ part of the society. Just this inability, as surfacing in e.g. criminality statistics, is picked up by the public and the media who thereby reinforce the already existing stereotypes. Additionally, encountering discriminative behaviour, or at least interpret a behaviour as such, is easily (miss-) understood as a threat to one's honour. Possibly, as a side-effect of the Turkish *culture*

of honour (Sev'er, 2008), one of the reasons for high criminality might be the inability to achieve and maintain an honourable status in German society. Especially for young males, a profoundly endorsed concept of honour bears potential consequences for the perceived relationship to the dominant group and one's role in society. More specifically, the influence of honour-related principles is amplified (von Gostomski, 2003). An example for such a principle is the *rule of retaliation*, which basically means: "If you cross me, I will punish you" (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). This is hinted at by the fact that many of the incidents where young Turks were involved in violent conflict can be more or less directly related to such principles. An extreme and rare but still powerful example are 'honour-killings', in which husband or brother killed wife or sister in an attempt to restore their own or their families' honour (Sev'er, 2008). Unsurprisingly, drama such as this is heavily covered in the media, further damaging the image of German-Turks as viewers overestimate how representative such events are.

So far, the focus has mainly been on the nondominant group in this conflict. However, an analysis of any conflict naturally cannot stop short of taking a closer look at both perspectives. As mentioned earlier, Germans mainly endorse an integrative acculturation attitude (Piontkowski et al., 2000). While this could be considered a prerequisite for successful integration of migrant groups, it remains limited as it is an indicator of attitude, not of behaviour. As established in numerous psychological studies, the link between attitude and behaviour varies enormously in its strength (e.g. Ajzen, 1991). Consequently, the endorsement of an integrative attitude does not necessarily mean the actual individual behaviour encourages integration as opposed to e.g. assimilation.

One reason to question the influence of the presented endorsement of integration attitudes amongst Germans is the fact that negatively stereotyping and discriminating Turks seems to be so common, even automatic (e.g. Kahraman & Knoblich, 2000). As Degner et al. (2007) demonstrated, German adolescents (13-15 years) not only reported open prejudice towards Turks, but also showed an automatic activation of a negative stereotype related to hostility.

In addition to the problems with discrimination, it can be argued that while most Germans approve a certain level of cultural maintenance on the Turkish side, they seem to consider their own role in the conflict as rather passive (Verdugo & Mueller, 2008). The Turks are expected to integrate themselves, which is thought to require adjustment and compromise on their part, not much so on the part of the host culture. In relation to Berry's (1989) dimension of *maintenance of relationships with other groups*, one could similarly

argue that Germans tend to expect the Turks to take a step towards them. Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of awareness of the restrictions that a passive stance may have on possible improvements in this conflict. This very attitude is expecting what could be summed up with the oxymoron of “self-integration”. By definition of integration in an acculturation context, this is simply not possible.

Conclusions

Of course, there are many approaches through which the situation of Turks in Germany could be ameliorated. In accordance with the focus of this essay, the conclusions drawn here are, in the same way as the preceding analysis, based on a more confined and theoretical approach to the conflict. Therefore, the following is supposed to serve as a framework on how to take the previous arguments into account when conceptualizing intervention strategies.

First of all, one of the core challenges standing in the way of improvement is summarized by the mismatch in acculturation attitudes. As expressed by the Turkish *separationist* attitude and the Germans expecting the Turks to “self-integrate”, passivity is common on both ends. In the media and public discussion for example, this is conveyed by a continuous back and forth about the question: who is responsible for integration? Obviously, the questions should rather be: what could Germans do and what could Turks do?

On the long run, measures taken should ignite reorientation here. This does not mean one has to focus on promoting the conceptual idea of *integration* excessively, even though this might help to a certain extent. More importantly, the experiences and circumstances leading to these attitudes have to be at the focal point of any intervention strategy. Specifically, the Turks will only start to embrace a more active stance if they believe group boundaries are actually permeable. As long as discrimination is as strong as it is and as long as the Turks *perceive* their economical, educational and social status to be glued to the bottom of society, no mitigation of the conflict is imaginable. Needless to say, improved policy in these areas is essential. However, the power of the *perception* of one’s own situation may be underestimated in this context. A more established self-efficacy of the Turks could turn out to be powerful in a way slight changes in policy are not.

Apart from the perception of the intergroup relation, it was deduced that relationship to the respective cultures in both cultural groups is complicating the situation. As every Turk in Germany is undergoing acculturation, influence of the host culture is inevitable. Even though a certain level of cultural maintenance is natural and important, complete preservation of

one's cultural heritage is simply impossible. In the same way, as migrant cultures become more and more embedded in German society, German culture is affected. In this sense, the realization must be made that an integrated culture only exists at a point between two original cultures.

To summarize, reshaping the cultural, social and psychological image of Turks held both by Turks themselves and by Germans is a prerequisite to successful integration. By taking this into account, political, economical or any other public intervention strategies might turn out to be more than just a drop in a bucket.

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