

## HANDOUT 2.1.3

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT LINCOLN

### *No Place to Call Home*

#### TURKISH IMMIGRANTS SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

By Katie Backman

2007

As the rain rhythmically pitter-patters on the white plastic tarps propped up over the fresh produce, Turkish vendors hold plates of sliced clementines, tangerines and oranges and shout for people to taste their fruits.

The rain pools on the tarps and men periodically reach for brooms to shove the water from the sagging canopies. Booths line the city-block-sized plaza, leaving two aisles barely wide enough for customers and their umbrellas to squeeze through. The customers quickly visit each booth to choose from this week's offerings of food, jewelry, linens and clothes.

But the weather doesn't stop customers from their weekend shopping at this market or others like it in this old city district. Turkish restaurants and shops selling döner kebabs — lamb or chicken in a pita, and some say, the country's best-selling fast food — share space on the neighborhood's streets with internet cafes and thrift stores.

This part of the city is home to some 200,000 Turks, and most of them have carved lives here where they rarely feel the need to travel beyond the boundaries of this district. But though they may act as if they are living in Istanbul, they are not. They are living in Kreuzberg, an eclectic collection of rundown buildings and luxury apartments, home to working-class families, affluent young professionals, gays and immigrants. Berlin's southernmost district, it includes the historic site of Checkpoint Charlie on the north and old Tempelhof Airport on the south.

More than 40 years after the first wave of *Gastarbeiter* — guest workers — arrived in the country, Turks are less integrated into Germany than ever before; the sheer numbers of them having created a parallel Turkish society within the German one. Many of these Turks were born here; in fact, many of them are second- or third-generation inhabitants of Germany, a country that has never considered itself a nation of immigrants.

They may live and work in Germany. They may send their children to German schools. But they are not — they and the Germans around them will say — German.

Turkish workers began coming to what was then West Germany in

the mid-1960s when unemployment had reached an unprecedented low. Of those who were unemployed, officials agreed many were either physically incapable of working or in the process of moving to new jobs. For all intents and purposes, everyone in Germany who wanted a job had one.

So the Turks came. As did the Italians, Spanish, Dutch, Greeks and North Africans. But mostly Turks. They were supposed to stay only a short while to help Germany — and other Western European countries — get through an unemployment crisis, but they did not go home. They became part of what *The New York Times*, in 1965, called “a great European migration.”

And yet, to a large extent, Germany denied they were there.

“Germany always denied being an immigrant country,” said Aldo Graziani, chairman of Berlin's Community Foundation, “so there was never talk of creating a program to help with the flow of immigrants.”

Graziani, whose organization serves as an outlet for Berlin's citizens to discuss community problems and their solutions, said it was the guest worker program that changed Germany. “I always understood Germany's history as being an immigrant country,” he said, “but that was denied for many decades by many politicians.”

Ahmet Nazif Alpman, the Turkish consul general in Berlin, agreed that Germany has never thought of itself as a nation of immigrants, and that, he said, keeps Germany from recognizing the contributions the Turks have made.

“There's a tendency to underestimate this role, this positive and contributive role of migrants, who are not guest workers anymore,” Nazif Alpman said as he sat in an antique chair in his canary-yellow living room in Berlin. “People have to understand that we need to live together and not side by side.”

Across Berlin, Karsten D. Voigt, coordinator of German-American Cooperation at the Federal Foreign Office, also agrees.

“We have to accept that we are an immigration country,” he said.

Nazif Alpman looks at the United States, which he believes has more seamlessly integrated immigrants, and wishes Germany could be more like America. But, he said, Germany has not yet reached immi-

gration maturity because of its history of not accepting “the other.”

A simple question, he says, indicates whether Germans are ready to accept Turks in their country: Do Germans see Turks simply as people who moved to Germany, or do they still see them as foreigners? Nazif Alpman blames the lack of integration on the personal preferences of both Germans and Turks and also on Germany's immigration policy.

Germany's Immigration Act, which went into effect on Jan. 1, 2005, is the nation's first attempt to provide a legislative framework to manage immigration as a whole. It promotes the integration of legal immigrants in Germany, in part by simplifying the residency permit process – reducing the number of permits from five to two – and in part by focusing on the purpose of residence instead of residence titles, such as students or migrant workers. The act provides for highly qualified or self-employed people to be granted a permanent residence, often referred to as a settlement permit.

Other provisions require new immigrants and foreigners who have been living in Germany to take courses for integration. The courses cover German language skills, history and culture lessons. If immigrants and foreigners don't attend the courses, they can be fined 1,000 Euros, currently about \$1,300 USD.

But the law is ever changing to accommodate immigrants' needs and abilities.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's cabinet approved a reform of Germany's immigration laws in March. Under the new laws, foreigners can obtain legal residence provided they find jobs by 2009 and have lived in Germany for at least eight years – six years for families with children. The draft law stipulates that applicants are not allowed to place a burden on local authorities by seeking additional social service payments once they have found employment.

The reform sets a minimum age of 18 years for foreign spouses to join their partners in Germany, provided the partner is also 18 or older. The newcomer is also required to have a basic knowledge of the German language. Officials said the move was intended to counter forced or arranged marriages.

But some officials in Turkey say the reform violates human rights. Turkey's Foreign Minister and Deputy Premier Abdullah Gul has criticized the law for requiring a level of language proficiency that could be difficult for some to achieve.

Those laws may be beside the point if Turkey joins the European Union, which the country has sought to do since October 2005. If the country is admitted, Turks can freely come and go from Germany whenever they want.

They will no longer be illegal.

However, many Germans oppose Turkey's admission to the EU. A BBC article published in 2006 said many Europeans don't see Turkey

as a European nation. Furthermore, the article foresees a wave of Turkish immigrants to Europe if Turkey becomes part of the union.

The influx of Turkish immigrants and the poor economy in Turkey itself could economically hurt the EU, the BBC article said. Also some think Turkey is too big and would try to have too much power within the bloc.

Turkey's struggle to enter the European Union is as difficult as the Turkish immigrants' struggle for acceptance in Germany.

Turks are not the only immigrants in Germany. Berlin alone is home to people from about 190 different ethnic backgrounds, according to Elke Pohl, public relations director for the state of Berlin's Office of Integration and Migration. But the Turks have tended to live together, in the center of Berlin, where older, cheaper apartments can be found. Such highly concentrated areas, she said, can allow immigrants to think they are still in Turkey.

“It's not easy to go out and integrate,” Pohl said, “when 30 to 40 percent of your community are non-Germans.”

Because Turks and Germans tend to live, work and go to school separately, they don't see much of each other. They are left to wonder what the other group is like. When the two groups do briefly come into contact, stereotypes can develop. Such stereotypes can lead to discrimination and racism.

Annika Bischof, 23, of Beeskow, Germany, is a communications major at Coventry University in England. She believes her generation is more accepting of different cultures than her parents' generation. But still, she said, cultural differences can lead to discomfort.

German men and women, for example, act as equals in their romantic relationships, Bischof said, while in Turkish couples the men seem to have control.

“Germans walk down the street side by side,” she said, “but when I see a Turkish man walking down the street, he is followed by his wife and children.” Bischof said she also has noticed that Turks often travel in larger groups, which makes some Germans feel uncomfortable; Germans, she said, usually walk alone or in small groups.

For their part, some Turkish people say they have been victims of prejudice from Germans, said Kenan Kolat, president of the Turkish Union. Germans often don't know what to think when they see Turkish women who wear headscarves and have three or more children in a nation with a declining birthrate, he said. Some think Turkish women's sole purpose is to bear children.

“One part of discrimination is racism,” Kolat said. “I can't explain feeling this look in people's eyes. You can see it in the subway, on the street. The eyes say a lot of things, and we can feel this. German people cannot feel this.”

For Pohl, the root cause of any immigration “problem” is education: Turkish immigrants arrive in Germany with too little of it. Without

basic education, she said, immigrants today can't get jobs, contributing to a nearly 40 percent unemployment rate among immigrants in Berlin.

"Some studies have proven that Germans just don't like foreigners or 'the other' cultures," Pohl said. "But (according to the studies) if they earned money, Germans would be more able to tolerate them."

Pohl believes Germans' inability to accept "the other" may be caught up in the nation's World War II history. But others think more recent history may also have had an impact.

Gerrit Book, 35, a freelance tour guide with the Goethe-Institut in Berlin, said the terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, changed Germans' attitudes toward Turks. Once Germans would have said "hello" to Turks on the street just as they would to Germans, he said. That changed after the attacks.

"Before, there were Turkish and Arabic," he said. "But now there are just Muslims. Now people start wondering what's happening behind closed doors of a Turkish home or mosque. Life for Turkish people got difficult after 9/11."

When it comes to hurdles, there is no barrier like language.

Language, Book said, is an important step toward assimilation into a community. Now, Germany's Immigration Act mandates that immigrants applying for residency must have "adequate knowledge of the German language."

If Turks don't know German, said Graziani of Berlin's Community Foundation, they will struggle getting jobs, and they won't be able to intermingle with Germans. In other words, he said, they won't be able to integrate.

Graziani believes immigrants should prepare more before living in Germany or trying to become citizens, learning for example, how to have a conversation with someone in German.

Kolat, of the Turkish Union, believes the perception that no Turk can speak German is a form of discrimination itself.

He said that when Germans recognize him as Turkish they often compliment his language skills. "They say, 'You speak good German,' and I say, 'You, too,'" Kolat said with a chuckle.

Burak Dimirkiran, 17, studies in a classroom where a majority of the students are Turkish or otherwise non-German. His father lived in Syria, then moved to Turkey and then to Germany. His mother, though Turkish, was born in Germany.

While Dimirkiran acknowledges that many Turks tend to keep to themselves because they haven't learned German, he is not one of them. He attends a school that teaches in German. And instead of going home and speaking Turkish for the rest of the day, Dimirkiran said he spends time with German friends and continues to speak German with them.

"The language barrier is not a problem for me," he said.

One of Dimirkiran's classmates, Damla Sarper, 16, said she, too, is comfortable speaking German because of school and the help of her German friends. Sarper, who wants someday to be a hairstylist, said she knows if she couldn't speak German, she wouldn't be able to get a job.

The 2005 Immigration Act also allocates funding for integration courses, which give participants a chance to have German conversations and to learn about German culture and laws.

These are just the latest programs that have been set up to educate the immigrants, said Voigt, of the Federal Foreign Office. Since the 1960s, laws have been revised to be more accommodating to the workers who came to Germany when the Germans sought their help.

When Germany held the 2006 FIFA World Cup, much was made of how enthusiastically the German people flew their flag. But Germans waved other flags during the World Cup games as well, not only banners that represented the teams they supported but also banners that celebrated their ethnic background.

"It is time," Voigt said, "for Germans to admit that their country is changing. Time to understand the myriad international connections shared by people living in Germany. Time to embrace the complex human mosaic that Germany has become."

"It would be silly to say that only Germans live in Germany," Voigt said, "but the Turks and other immigrants living in Germany need to adjust to their new country."

"I think it should be a lesson for us that one should not reduce the complexity of human beings to one identity," Voigt said, pointing out that he considers himself not only a German but also a European, an intellectual and a Protestant, and that's just for starters.

Still, as Ahmet Geredeli stands behind a fresh produce stand on a rainy, cold Saturday, he remembers the day in 1970 when he and his parents moved from Turkey to Berlin. His father was among the 2.1 million guest workers who had come to Germany already by that year. Geredeli's father, who, like most of the guest workers, didn't have much of an education, worked as a mechanic.

Geredeli was just 14, and that day, for the first time, he came face to face with people who didn't want him living in their country. Today, nearly 40 years later, Geredeli said he still feels some Germans don't want him here.

"They will say things like, 'Go back to your own country. Your parents are uninvited,'" he said. "But to me this is my home country. Why should I go away?"

Backman, Kate. (2007). No Place to Call Home. In *Renovating the Republic: Unified Germany Confronts its History*. University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

## UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT LINCOLN

*Seeking Acceptance***TURKS WANT TO GAIN CITIZENSHIP WITHOUT LOSING CULTURE***By Katie Backman*

2007

Imagine that you've lived in the same country your whole life.

You've grown up in this country. You've gone to school here. You have found a job and even started your own family.

But none of that matters to the locals. You, your parents, your grandparents weren't supposed to stay. You were all supposed to finish your work and leave.

But you did not go back. You stayed.

You are a foreigner. And to many people here, you will always be one. Some of them even think you don't belong just because of the color of your skin or your religion. It doesn't matter if you speak their language because they pick up on your accent.

You are not a citizen. And you are never supposed to seek citizenship.

This is the scenario many Turks living in Germany struggle with every day.

And yet, to some Turks, like Burak Can, a lawyer in Berlin, Germany remains a country of possibilities. It is a country where people like Can have a chance to succeed.

Many of the guest workers who came here more than four decades ago thought the same thing originally: They saw Germany as a chance to improve their lives.

In the mid-1960s, West Germany invited men from Turkey and other countries to come to work – guest workers. Germany had a shortage of workers, and the country needed temporary help. It seemed like a good short-term solution.

But many of the guest workers didn't leave. They had been trained for the jobs, and the German employers didn't want to retrain new employees. So the workers stayed. And then their families came.

Today, Turks in Germany are often men and women without a country. They haven't fully assimilated into Germany mainly because their culture is so different. They feel as if Germany doesn't want them because they are still perceived as foreigners. And Turkey doesn't want them back because they are seen as having abandoned their home country.

Such barriers prevent Turkish-Germans, such as Can, who has been a German citizen for 15 years, from feeling welcome, respected and needed.

"I work in a very conservative profession," Can said in English, his third language. "When you look like me, with the long hair, and have a Turkish name, people think that perhaps I am not a good lawyer or speak good German because my name sounds strange. It's not German."

"Germans have an idea about Turkish immigrant people," Can continued. "It's that these are only workers, not professional type guys."

On Jan. 1, 2000, Germany reformed its citizenship laws to try to correct the problems that stemmed from the guest worker program. The families from the guest worker program pay their taxes and abide by the country's laws.

They're no longer guests.

The reformed laws are an attempt to show that foreigners are welcome if they seek citizenship. Germany has three ways for a person to become a citizen: by birth, by naturalization and by "right of return," a route open only to ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the Soviet successor states.

Formerly, immigrants couldn't become citizens unless they were born in Germany and had a German parent – "citizenship by inheritance," the law called it.

As an alternative, the previous law also permitted a person to have residency for 15 years – though many say that is too long. Now the laws say that children born to non-citizens in Germany have an automatic claim to German citizenship if at least one parent has lived legally in Germany for at least eight years, rather than the previous requirement of 15 years. Those children will be allowed to hold dual citizenship until they are 23 years old, at which time they will be required to choose German or a foreign citizenship.

About 100,000 children have been born in Germany to non-citizens each year for the past 10 years.

To be naturalized, foreigners must give up their native citizenship at age 23, have a record clean of felonies and be able to support themselves and their families. Applicants must also be able to speak German and know the country's basic laws.

Some exemptions exist for giving up dual citizenship, such as economic loss of property rights in the former country or unreasonable fees for renouncing citizenship – costs for things like processing and translating citizenship status, marriage licenses and other such legal

paperwork into the new country's language.

In addition, the law is not retroactive. Those who had dual citizenship before the new laws passed are allowed to keep it.

In January 2000 when the new regulations took effect, approximately 3.6 million foreigners had lived in Germany for 10 years or more, which meant they had fulfilled the new eight-year residency requirement, according to the German Embassy.

In 2000, 103,900 Turks obtained German citizenship. The number of Turks seeking citizenship has gradually declined since the new laws have passed.

The reformed law has helped immigrants like Ahmet Geredeli adapt to their new country. Geredeli immigrated to Germany from Turkey in 1970 because his father was a member of the guest worker program.

His father, like many of the other guest workers from Turkey, didn't go back. Instead, he began calling Germany home. Geredeli is a German citizen, and so are his children. He said, through an interpreter, that he wanted his children to have German citizenship because he believed it would create an easier life for them.

"Turkey and Germany are both my countries," he said. "Turkey is my country of origin, and Germany is my home."

Geredeli still returns to Turkey to see his family. But, like many other Turks who live in Germany, he has found that he isn't always welcome in Turkey. To some, he is seen as a person who abandoned his native land.

Geredeli said neither nation fully accepts the choices he has made.

Kenan Kolat, president of the Turkish Union in Berlin, agreed. "When Turkish people are in Germany, they are foreigners," Kolat said. "But those same Turkish people who live in Germany are also considered as foreigners to the people in Turkey because those people left their country."

Can believes it will take years for things to change. Turks living in Germany still want to feel Turkish, and some Germans still don't accept members of a different culture.

Can says he shouldn't have to feel guilty about being Turkish. He said he knows the German language and history, sometimes better than natives, but he's still not accepted.

When Can meets new people, he said, they usually compliment his speaking skills and ask him why he's in Germany. He feels as if he has to explain why he's a Turk living in Germany and how he became a lawyer.

Many Germans see immigrants, especially the Turkish ones, as not being able to learn the language properly or go to university, Can said.

"Sometimes I think the German society will never accept us how we are and who we are, despite that we have been living here for about 40 years," Can said.

Kolat said many Turks who moved to Germany still have love for and pride in Turkey, and they want to show those feelings by keeping a tie to the country: their citizenship.

This was the case for Can, who had both German and Turkish citizenships before the reform law was passed.

"Having two citizenships is a privilege," Can said, "and I guess no one wants to give it up."

Former Turkish citizens who move back can apply for a blue card, which gives them rights similar to citizenship, but they can't vote or be elected to a political position in Turkey.

Many Germans don't know what to think about the Turkish culture, Can said. Because of fear of "the other," he said, many Germans want Turks to give up their heritage as soon as they become citizens. They want them to act more German.

But many Turks may see things differently.

As Can said, "I have a culture, and this culture is not very bad. So why do I have to give up my culture? I am a part of this city. I am a part of this country."

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